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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUCHAREST 000583

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/NCE AND NEA/ELA ERICA MILLER AND STEPHEN
NEWHOUSE.

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SY](#) [LE](#) [RO](#)

SUBJECT: ROMANIA AGREES: NEED CONCRETE ACTIONS FROM SARG

REF: STATE 78880

Classified By: Acting-Polcoun Chris Ellis; Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: MFA Middle East Director Dobre said that Romania's policy towards Syria is based on the expectation for concrete actions and accomplishments before political concessions can be offered. End Summary.

¶2. (C) POLOFF delivered reftel demarche on July 24, to MFA Director for Middle East and Africa Mihai Dobre. Dobre confirmed that Romania's policy is based on the principle that Syria needs to undertake concrete actions and accomplishments before political concessions can be offered; an outlook which he said was also at the core of EU discussions on Syria. In Romania's view, Syria has been the lesser partner in a "Damascus-Tehran Axis." He said positive Syrian actions, like the withdrawal from Lebanon, came under international pressure "when they have few choices." He described the November 2007 events as the apex of international and political crisis regarding Syria because of the depths of Damascus's culpability in the Lebanese situation. He noted Syrian activities largely reflected Damascus's concern that the Special Tribunal could accuse "certain important Syrian persons" of involvement in the Harari assassination.

¶3. (C) Dobre described a Syrian-Iranian relationship which has alienated some within the Arab League, especially Saudi Arabia. He argued that the sectarian rifts in Lebanon could be tied to Damascus. Although Syria claimed that it had a role in mediating the end of the crisis in Beirut--of which Dobre said he has seen no supporting evidence -- the resolution was clearly not a victory for Lebanon, which was forced to agree to a minority veto in its government. Syria's backing for Hizballah and Hamas would not promote progress in the region, he observed. Dobre pointed out that Damascus was "not very vocal politically" in the aftermath of the Israeli strike against the Al-Kibar site. He pondered whether this meant that Damascus was unwilling to forego the Turkish-brokered indirect talks with Israel. If this was the case, he thought then it would be good for the MEPP. He also hoped that Damascus would follow through on Asad's announcement at the Mediterranean Union Summit in Paris that Syria would establish diplomatic missions in every capital. "Good if it is implemented," Dobre exclaimed. He has also noted more cautious language coming out of Damascus again, Dobre qualified, "but we will see."

¶4. (C) Dobre thought that there was little chance to make headway on regaining political ground lost on the pending 2004 EU agreement with Syria, which was dropped in the aftermath of the Harari assassination. The EU will need "concrete and reasonable gestures" from Damascus before that issue was raised again. He acknowledged Romania has had some "working-level" visits with Damascus "to keep open the lines of communication and maintain a positive relationship." He also noted that Finance Minister Vosganian visited Damascus in June, but maintained that none of these trips were politically significant. Nonetheless, Dobre pointed out that Syria is an important player in the region and is in a better position to break with Iran and make space for an agreement with Israel. "We must encourage them (Syria) to do that," he concluded.

¶5. (C) Comment: Romania will continue to press for maintaining "good, working relations" with Syria for historical reasons (reaching back to NAM days), and for some specific commercial and financial interests. Romania knows our cautionary views, and will continue to try to please the USG as well as stick to the EU consensus. We will simply have to keep a watchful eye and occasionally remind our Romanian friends that there are some things--like political change in Syria--that money cannot buy. End Comment.
TAUBMAN